

Tourism in North East India: Problems and Prospects, A Sociological study of Tourism Industry in the District of Lakhimpur, (Assam)

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ABSTRACT

The paper intends to explore prospects and problems of emerging tourism in North- East India especially in Lakhimpur district (Assam). The district has plenty of socio-cultural and natural resources. It is culturally rich and historically a significant part in north-east India which has a unique natural beauty. In view of religion and spirituality, the area is also considered as a place of holy land where many religious Vaishnava Temples, Satras and Thans are there and various type of most respectful spiritual leaders "Vaishnava Gurus" were born.. There are many tourist places, attractive religious and spiritual Temples and Thans in the district. Above all these monastic institutions, holy and naturally beautiful places have been playing an important role in socio-economic life of the people and also play a key role in creating and developing the tourist places in the district. Birth places of Vaishnavite saint, historical important forts and ponds, Temples, Satras, Thans, and Douls (a kind of temples) and many other natural and geographical monuments make easy to promote possibility of tourist industry in the district. So the study focused on the problems and possibilities of tourism industry in the district.

Keywords : *Resources, Spirituality, Monastic institutions, Natural beauty, Tourism industry.*

Received : 24/8/2026 **DOI :** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23031898> **Acceptance:** 30/8/2026

Introduction:

In modern society the tourism industry has emerged with a new form which has been playing an important role in the socio-economic development. At present tourism becomes one of the most important, popular, largest and most expanding industries in the world. Due to the increase of complexity of modern human lifestyle, the mental stress, anxiety, and worries of human beings rapidly emerged. Therefore, the people want to relax from their tough daily engagement scheduled by enjoying tour. As a result of such perception, the new concept of tourism has emerged and becomes more popular. Recently, it was recognized by govt. of India as an industry for economic growth, job creation, and leading to policies in 1980. There is a lot of potentiality in various fields for traditional and

previously established tourist destinations as well as previously undiscovered and unused tourist destinations. The Lakhimpur district located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and on the border of Arunachal Pradesh has a unique position for its availabilities of resources for tourism. However, despite having the various necessary resources and assets for consideration and development of tourist sector, the modern tourism industry has not achieved the expected target in the district. As

Tourism expert Michael Peter has pointed out that tourist's importance and attractions can be divided into five sub-sections that are- cultural, traditional, natural and scenic, recreational and others these are found in the district that make it important for tourism industry..

Objectives :

The study attempts to trace and identify the possibilities of and potentialities to create tourism in the district. It tries to find out major problems and challenges to the development of tourism in the district. Moreover it suggests the measures for the development of tourism in the area.

Methodology:

The study is based on total rural population of tourism areas of the district. Due to the conceptual and explorative nature of the study, the investigator adopted descriptive research design. Since the study focused on the potentiality and various challenges of tourism in the district, the study is mainly based on secondary data. The secondary data are collected from authored and edited books, journals, magazines, news papers and research papers published in journals .

Tourism Industry in Lakhimpur District:

The Lakhimpur district has own historical heritage, geo-physical and socio-cultural characteristics. The name of the Lakhimpur district is believed to be originated from the word “Lakshmi”, the Goddess of prosperity. 85% of the population of the district is mainly depended upon agriculture and paddy. The term Paddy is regarded locally as “Lakhimi” and the word “Pur” means “full”. Lakhimpur, therefore, means full of paddy or the place where paddies are grown abundantly. As per Lakhimpur District Gazetteer (1976: 4). Lakhimpur notified as district through a proclamation issued by Governor General on July, 1839. On 2nd October, 1971 the district was recognized with two subdivision viz. Dhemaji and North Lakhimpur. In 1989 again the Dhakuakhana and North Lakhimpur declared as two subdivisions and declared Dhemaji as a separate district of Assam. The District covers an area of 2277 Square km (879 square miles) out of which 2257 Sq. km. is rural areas, where 91.24% of total population of the district is inhabited in the rural areas.

Agriculture is the main occupation, 92.67% population of the district lives in rural areas. It also produces three different kinds of skills-Pat, Muga, and Ari which have a very high demand in the national and international markets. It is inhabited by significant population of Mishing, Deuri, Sonowal, Kacharis, Thengal and Khamti. Besides, there are 14% Muslim, 4.12% of Christian, 3.02% Nepalese population settled in the district. The other main castes are GC, SC, OBC and MOBC, etc. The district is a most lovely area of Assam. In terms of the potentiality of tourism industry in Lakhimpur district, its historical monuments and religious sites are certainly one of the considerations. These can play an influential role in making the district a centre of tourist region.

Centres of Tourist Attraction in Lakhimpur District:

In view of religion and spirituality, the area is considered as a place of holy land where religious philosophers and most respectful spiritual leaders or “Vaishnav Gurus” were born. But Mahapurush Madhabdev, Badala Padma Ata, Sri Sri Anirudhadev, Haridev, Keshab Charan Ata, Narayan Ata, Gobinda Mishra, Gopal Ata, Haricharan Ata etc. are deeply respected and admired. There are many religious and spiritual Temples, Thans and Douls in the district. Boudhistr Temple, Shiva Mandir, Durga Mandir, Ganesh Mandir, Sani Mandir, Maghnowa Doul, Padumoni Than, Basudev Than, Sri Sri Anirudhadev Than, Petua Gushani Than, Keshabcharan Ata Than, Phulani than, Harhi Dewal, Garakhiya Doul, Nil Dewaloy, Panchanan Dewal, Loan Pani Doul, Paka Doul, Boithawati Dewaloy, Naharani Than, Burhi Gushani Than, Deughar, Gharmara Satra, Leteku Pukhuri Than, Changini Than, Lokpani Temple, Hanuman Temple etc. are markable religious places, the centres of tourist attraction.

Historically many Satras were established in the Mahabahu Brahputra valley in the district during 16th to 19th centuries. But some of them shifted,

destroyed or unable to exist due to the various natural and other phenomenon like-flood, earthquake, damaging assault, encroachment and division of Majuli district from Lakhimpur. These monastic institutions of the district have been playing a significant role in development, preservation and spreading Vaishnavite views in sphere of socio-cultural and spiritual aspects. These spiritual institutions were established by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev. Among his disciples mainly Sri Sri Anirudhadeva established a satra at Vishnu Balikuchi in early 17th century. The most prominent monastic institutions of Lakhimpur district are-Belaguri Satra, Bodula satra, Narua satras, Ghamara satras, Ahotguri satras, Naharati satras, Alengi satras, Adhar satras, Boralengi Satras, Anadi satras, Madarguri satras, Sakrahi satras, Dahghar satras, Bogi ai satras, Bahgengani Satras, etc. Apart from the religious Temples, Satras and Thans of the district, it has many historically significant Forts in this region, through which the district can also be made suitable for tourist place. Rajgarh, Dhemagarh and Harmati Fort, Gohai Kamal Ali and others are important historical Forts of the district

Ponds as crucial place of biodiversity, some of most important historical ponds are found in this district. These ponds are more crucial for biodiversity, supporting a wide range of plants, various species of birds, reptiles and aquatic animals. The Peravari Pond, Roudong Pond, Digha Pond, Kanthal Pond, Radha Pukhuri, Rangti Pukhuri, Gohai Pukhuri, Ghilaguri Pond, Gushani Pukhuri, Bor Pukhuri, Nahar Pukhuri, Gushaipukhuri, Borala Pukhuri, Letekupukhuri, Ujjir pukhuri, Naharpukhuri, Jur Pukhuri, Gela pukhuri, Rahdhala pukhuri, Puta pukhuri, Bali pukhuri, Kalita Pukhuri, Kacha pukhuri, Bortala pukhuri etc. are famous ponds. By preserving and promoting these ponds, we can hold our cultural and historical significance, features in local legends, festivals, traditional practices which can make it attractive to tourists. Rivers are also incredible places of biodiversity, supporting wide

range of plants and animal species. They are often referred to as the “arteries of our planet” (grahar Dhamani) providing water, food and ecosystem services to billions of people. The rivers in the district, including the Brahmaputra, Subansiri, Ranganadi, Dikrong, Sessa, Drupang, Pichala, Meneha, Gabharu, Samarjan, Ghagar, Kakoi, Boginadi, Kana nadi, Champara, Sumdiri, Singara, Karha, Charikaria, Sumdiri, Loit, Khabalu etc. not only witnessed many historical events of the district but also plays a very significant role in forming the district’s landscape, existing the reptile’s and aquatic lives and surviving local climate and agriculture and continuously carries the beauty and peacefulness of the nature. Further, “the Sessa Pung” and “Madhabdev Kalkhetra” and “Pabha Sanctuary” also have been playing a vital role for development and encouraging the tourism industry in the district. The tourism industry is a promising sector not only for Lakhimpur but also across the state. The state is soon converting itself into a tourist hub. Government already has given importance and launched the various scheme for development and recognition of tourism in different part of the state. Consequently it is bound to expand tourism industry and promote the rich cultural heritage and identity of the state.

Possibilities of Tourism Industry in Lakhimpur District

Natural beauty and scenes. greatly attract tourists from all sides that promote tourism industry. It is to be noted that Madhadev Kalakhetra, Pabha sanctuary, Sessa pung, and holy rivers like-the Mahabahu Brahmaputra, various ponds, Tea gardens etc. provide a peaceful tranquility and vivid excellent natural settings for tourists of the region. Monastic institution like-Madhabdev Than, Basudev Than, Badala satra, Bela guri satra, Anirudha Than, Podumoni Than, Maghnova Dou, Petuwa Goshayee Than etc. have been playing a significant role in the development of spirituality and humanity in society. These institutions always perform spirituality and devotedness of mankind and try to give the way to God by performing pray. It also helps to enrich the

cultural heritage of Assam by preserving traditional art, music, and various kinds of dance forms like Satriyas. In fact, Assam is a wealthy state in cultural and diverse ethnicity which can be promoted to tourist places. In this regard, the district of is specially significant as the cultural and religious festivals, handicrafts, significant aesthetics of the district can create tourist places across the state.

The combination of such essential monastic institutions and natural beauty creates the market system to the villagers that can fulfill the needs of tourists and inhabitants. For declaration and recognition of tourist places, monuments, tourist accommodation, infrastructure, communications etc. are required. Admittedly these features are abundantly available in the district. It is to be noted that the different tourism places of the state are characterized by their significant renowned historical events, monuments, cultural heritages and traditions, unique attractive location, diverse gift of nature like-climate, weather, and beauty of geographical area. The district also is no exception to these characteristics. Besides this contribution of nature , the region has a mixed and sustainable culture of many ethnic groups, races, languages and religions. The songs, dances, festivals, folk arts, food, clothing, housing, lifestyle etc. of the ethnic groups are sure to fascinate the tourists.

Problems of Tourism in Lakhimpur District:

Though various scopes and opportunities are available for possibilities of tourism, but its problems are no less challenging..The language barrier is one of the most serious challenges for tourism especially rural tourism in the district. The persons engaged in rural tourist places like- Mandirs, Thans, Satras and any other tourist's related places are unable to speak and understand other language viz. Hindi, English except local language. As a result, they can't mutually interact with tourist persons. Second most significant barriers of rural tourism is poor professional tourist guide. The study found that the guides are not up dated and poor in doing their work properly. Another

most important factor that challenges the development of rural tourism is lack of skillful manpower in the industry. Generally maximum numbers of the rural tourist places are situated in remote and backward places. In such places those who are well trained in tourism sector they are not interested to do their work in such backward places. Another responsible factor is low level of infrastructure and communicational facilities are another challenges to the growth of tourism industries in rural areas. Besides these barriers, the rural tourism have been facing failure of Network connectivity, poor road communication and Banking facilities, high-quality hotels and restaurants, absence of tourism agency etc. It is to be noted that the Lakhimpur is a district covered by flood during the rainy season. This kind of natural phenomenon dampen the development of rural tourism in the district. Poor publicity, encroachment and lack of awareness ,education and political interest etc. are other significant problems in development of tourism in the district. Admittedly, poor publicity of valuable resources and flood during rainy season make difficult to know the bio-diversity, beauty of nature cultural heritage ,historical monuments and monastic institutions of the district. Moreover, because of uncontrolled encroachment by local people and Arunachal tribes and lack of political interest the state including the district fail to promote tourism in Lakhimpur district.

Conclusion :

Thus the Lakhimpur district occupies various significant resources for growth and development of tourism industry. .Presently the progress of tourism in Assam is not satisfactory. Though the district has so high possibilities on its potentialities, all these sources of possibilities are not utilized. In this context, it is not only essential but also responsibilities of state and central governments, stakeholders and local people to be actively engaged and provide cooperation to promote tourism by properly developing the infrastructures, increasing awareness and educating the various sectors of tourism in the district. As a result,

such type of promotion of particular region will not only attract the tourist but also improve economic growth of the region.

Recommendation:

For overcoming the challenges of growing tourism industry in the district, it is pointed out that the educational facility must be provided to decrease the language problems. Since tour guides plays a vital role in the growth and development of tourism industry, the tour guides should be provided adequate education and training. Banking with ATM facilities, network facilities, and road communication, marketing, tour facilities etc. should be made available near the tourist areas. The Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Forests of Assam govt. should give the especial attention on the area for making a tourist site. The state government should develop the safety measure in tourist places to attract maximum number of tourists. Focusing on preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage by organizing cultural festivals, showcasing traditional arts, crafts, and music also promote growth of tourism. The availability of clean and well-maintained public conveniences, drinking water facilities etc. attract tourists. The district has a significant potentialities for eco-tourism because of its own beautiful geographical sites especially river bank of the Brahmaputra river and wide range of forest areas in the border areas of Arunachal Pradesh. Awareness and inclusion of tourism in school and university curriculum are expected to improve prospects of tourism in the district.



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