



Prospects and Challenges of Tourism Industry in Meghalaya- Socio-Geographical Approach

Sukanta Sarkar¹, Thijien Tharjiath Keat² and Belete Debasu Gebrie³

Abstract

The paper discusses the prospects and challenges of the tourism industry in Meghalaya. It has been found that the tourism industry is growing in Meghalaya. It benefits employment creation, income generation, revenue, foreign exchange, infrastructure building etc. Meghalaya is known for its natural beauty, lush greenery, and hills. There are ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and agri-tourism opportunities. It is rich in flora and fauna, heritage and traditions, culture, wildlife etc. Travellers can participate in rock climbing, water sports, caving, trekking, and hiking. Meghalaya has numerous travel attractions for tourists. Seven Sisters Falls, Mawphlang Sacred Forest, Elephant Falls, Mawsynram, Cherrapunji, Dawki River, Laitlum Canyon, Living Root Bridges, Umiam Lake and Nohakalikai Falls are the popular tourist destinations. Abysmal infrastructure, lack of alternative means of transport, boundary issues, poor connectivity, and ethnic conflicts are the major challenges. Therefore, the Government should implement proper policies to mitigate the constraints and development of tourism in the state.

Introduction

Globally, the tourism industry is growing very rapidly. It is a source of income and work for the locals. It gives scope for understanding the religion, language, culture, and customs of the people. Numerous countries exist whose economy depends on the tourism industry. Tourism generally means the movement of people for adventure, fun or business purposes (Mazumder, 2022). Different travellers have different purposes. Activities, amenities, accommodation, accessibility, and attraction are the vital components of the tourism industry. Many people prefer vacations for a break of their daily life. Tourism brings foreign currencies without depleting domestic resources. It brings many benefits to host destinations (Peinlan, 2019). Cultural exchange between foreigners and citizens, developing the infrastructures, jobs for the youths, and revenue

¹ Dr. Sukanta Sarkar, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Gambella University, Ethiopia, Email: sukantaeco@gmail.com, (ORCID-ID-0000-0003-3041-061X)

² Thijien Tharjiath Keat, Lecturer, Department of Economics, Gambella University, Ethiopia, Email: tharjiathkeat@gmail.com

³ Belete Debasu Gebrie, Lecturer, Department of Economics, Gambella University, Ethiopia, Email: BeleteDebasu@gmu.edu.et.

of the economy are the basic benefits that any country can feel due to the tourism sector's development (Mazumder, 2020).

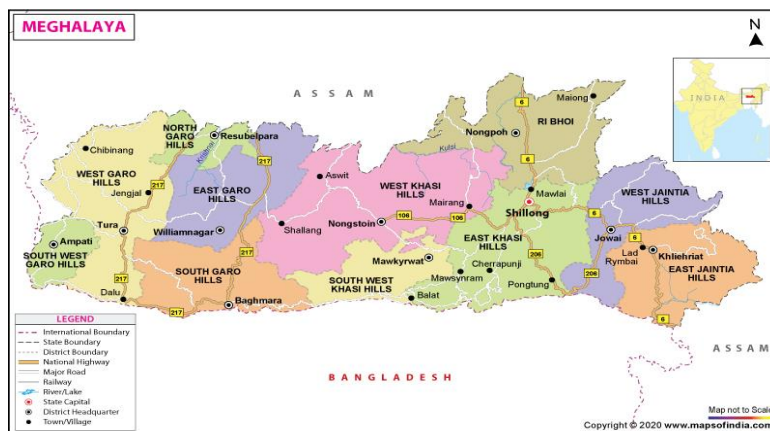
The Northeast of India is home of beautiful landscapes and wildlife sanctuaries. The climate of this region is quite enjoyable. This region is called as the Seven sisters of India. The seven states of the region are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram (Sharma et. al., 2023). People from tribal and ethnic communities dominate this region. They are from different ethno-cultural groups (Sattar, 2018). Each state has unique culture and customs. Guwahati is largest city and business centre. It is called the 'Gateway to North East India'. Christianity is the major religion in Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya. Hinduism is popular religion in Assam, Tripura and Manipur. Pork and rice are popular foods (Bhattacharjee & Khataniar, 2022).

Objectives

The objectives of the paper are: (a) to observe the status of the tourism industry in Meghalaya, (b) To study the prospects of the tourism industry in Meghalaya, and (c) to identify challenges before the tourism industry in Meghalaya.

The Study Area

Meghalaya is located in the Northeastern part of India. Meghalaya covers approximately 22,429 square kilometres of areas. The state has a border with Bangladesh and Assam. It has a border with the Sylhet, Mymensingh, and Rangpur division of Bangladesh. It was formed on 21st January 1972. It is predominantly an agrarian economy and rich in minerals. Nearly 70 per cent of the state's land is covered by forests. Shillong is the capital and largest city. There are 12 districts in the state. According to a 2011 census report, the state's population is 2,964,007. The population density is 130/km², where 20.07 per cent and 79.93 per cent of people live in urban and rural areas respectively.



Methods and Materials

- **Design and approach:** The present study is based on the secondary data. The data was collected from the Department of Tourism, Govt. of Meghalaya, and Meghalaya Tourism Statistics reports. Various journals and books have also been referred in the present study.
- **Method of analysis:** To reveal the growth of the tourism industry of Meghalaya in general and the sustainable perspectives of the industry in particular, different quantitative and qualitative analyses comprising of tabulation, regression analysis and text analysis were performed.
- **Hypothesis:**
 H_{01} : The coronavirus pandemic has no impact on tourist arrivals in Meghalaya.
 H_{1a} : The coronavirus pandemic has an impact on tourist arrivals in Meghalaya.
 H_{02} : There is no relation between tourist arrivals and Meghalaya's gross state domestic product.
 H_{1b} : There is a relation between tourist arrivals and Meghalaya's gross state domestic product.

Results and Discussion

Meghalaya is a small state with natural landscapes and natural beauty. There are 12 districts. More or less every district has tourism potential. Meghalaya tourism department offers adventure tourism opportunities as rock climbing, water sports, caving, trekking, and hiking. There are more ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and agri-tourism opportunities. There are scopes of hard and soft tourism activities. Travellers can be involved in hard tourism, such as rock climbing, trekking, caving, etc. Soft adventure tourists like bird watching, eco-tour, fishing, boating, etc. Tourists can use the homestay, homely stay in local resorts. Travellers can be involved in barn dances, campfires, meeting barnyard animals, breweries etc.

Table 1: Percentage shares and rank of different Northeastern States in domestic and foreign tourist visits, during 2021

State	Tourist				Percentage Share		Rank 21	
	Domestic	Rank	Foreign	Rank	DTV	FTV	DTV	FTV
Arunachal	102915	V	182	VII	0.02	0.02	33	32
Assam	1409161	I	536	III	0.21	0.05	23	27
Manipur	49371	VII	648	II	0.01	0.06	35	26
Meghalaya	154409	IV	411	IV	0.02	0.04	31	28
Mizoram	87232	VI	234	VI	0.01	0.02	34	31
Nagaland	23968	VIII	325	V	0.00	0.03	36	29



Sikkim	511669	II	11508	I	0.08	1.09	25	13
Tripura	177816	III	5	VIII	0.03	0.00	30	36

Source: India Tourism Statistics, 2022, p.141.

The above table (1) discussed the percentage shares and rank of different northeastern states of India. It has been found that highest number of domestic tourist visited Assam, followed by the Sikkim, and Tripura. Least number of domestic tourist visited the Nagaland, preceded by the Manipur, and Mizoram. Highest number of foreign tourist visited Sikkim, followed by the Manipur, and Assam. Least number of foreign tourist visited Tripura, preceded by the Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland. Therefore, Meghalaya is in fourth position domestic and foreign tourist arrivals among the northeastern states.

Meghalaya is blessed with undulating topography, gushing springs, exotic flora and fauna, sub-tropical forests, waterfalls and misty mountains. This is perfect place for adventure tourism, as rock climbing, water sports, caving (spelunking), trekking, and hiking. speedboats. There are many natural and man-made lakes. Garo, Khasi and Jaintia hills are the major hills. Shillong, Cherrapunjee, Mawsynram, Jowai, and Tura are major hill stations. Shillong, Tura, and Jowai are the larger towns. Shillong, Tura, and Jowai are situated in Khashi hills, Garo hills, and Jaintia hills respectively. Majority of the tourist spots are natural based and local people are more concern about the conservation of the nature. November to January are peak months for travellers.

Table 2: Year-wise Tourist Arrivals in Meghalaya

Year	Tourist		Percentage Share		Rank	
	Domestic	Foreign	DTV	FTV	DTV	FTV
2011	667504	4803	0.08	0.03	25	27
2012	680254	5313	0.07	0.03	26	27
2013	691269	6773	0.06	0.04	26	28
2014	716469	8664	0.06	0.04	27	28
2015	751165	8027	0.05	0.03	27	28
2016	830887	8476	0.05	0.03	26	29
2017	990856	12051	0.06	0.04	27	28
2018	1198340	18114	0.06	0.06	27	27



2019	1245633	25813	0.05	0.08	27	28
2020	24734	2311	0.00	0.03	34	29
2021	154409	411	0.02	0.04	31	28

Source: India tourism statistics reports.

The above table (2) argued the year-wise tourist arrival in Meghalaya. It has observed that the number of tourist visits had been on rise since 2011 and declined after 2019 due to the corona pandemic. Domestic tourist arrival was more than 12.45 lakhs in 2019, which dropped to only 24.73 thousand in 2020. On the other hand, foreign tourist arrivals were 25.81 thousand in 2019, and it was just 2.31 thousand in 2020. Lockdowns, and travelling restriction, due to the corona pandemic are the main factors behind the sudden drop of the tourist arrivals. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted, i.e. there is impact of corona pandemic on tourist arrivals in Meghalaya.

Behdeinkhlam is main festival of Jaintias. It is celebrating in July-August at Chyrmang, Thadmuthlong, Mukhla, Ialong and Jowai. Jaintias are dominated in West Jaintia Hills District, and the other tribes are the Biates, Bhois, and Wars. Jaintia people have skills in making baskets, stools, and cane mats. They are also weaving of carpet and the making of pineapple fiber articles, jewellery, and musical instruments. Crafts, art, dances, music, are traditions are important part of Jaintia culture. Khasi hills, Jaintia hills, and Garo hills have the abundance of natural heritage. Sohpetbneng Peak, Spread Eagle Falls, Sweet Falls, Nongkhnum islands, Kyllang Rock, Elephant Falls, Diengiepeak, and Cherrapunjee are the popular places in Khasi hills. Balpakram national wildlife park, Nengkong, Balpakram, Siju caves, Resubalpara and Wakso chiring are the tourist places in Garo hills. Bishop and Beadon falls, Elephant falls, Sweet falls, Lmilchang dare falls, and Spread eagle falls are popular waterfalls. Travellers can enjoy the Shillong peak and Tura peak.

Table 3: District-wise Tourist Places in Meghalaya

District	Tourist Places
East Garo Hills	Chisobibra, Rongrengiri Reserve Forest
North Garo Hills	Jolding Wari, Radi Nokat, Na.ka Chikong, Rasna Dare, Chitim tim Dare, Ganna Ramram lake, Rongma Gitil, Rangdokram, Sawal Wari, and Rangjokram lake.
South Garo Hills	Balpakram National Park, Boldak Matchu Karam, Chidimak, Matchru, Areng Patal, Goncho Dare, Dikkini Ring, Rongsaljong Agal, Rongsobok Rongkol, and Siju Cave.
West Garo Hills	Nokrek Biosphere Reserve, Tura Peak, Pelga Falls, Wadagokgre, Sasatgre, Chibragre, and Rombagre.



South West Garo Hills	The tomb of Mir Jumla II, Katta Beel.
East Khasi Hills	Shillong City, Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures, Lady Hydari Park, Ward's Lake, Cathedral Catholic Church, Capt. Williamson Sangma State Museum, Golf Course, Elephant Falls, and Shillong Peak.
West Jaintia Hills	Thlu Muwi, Nartiang Monoliths, and Ialong Park.
East Jaintia Hills	Moopun Waterfalls, Rynji Falls, Umbyrlein Falls, Sahksaw, Lumchyrmit, and Moolamyliang.
South West Khasi Hills	Jakrem Hot Spring, Symper rock, Umngi River, Phlangja Ud-Cave, Rilang View Point, Tynrong Synrang Murin, Bombell Rock, Synrangbah Cave, Dongnob Falls, Synrang Sngi Rock, Tynrong Manbasa, Tynnai View Point, Ranikor, Gomaghat, and Kyllai Lyngsngun Peak.
West Khasi Hills	Sohtyngkhur, Mawphanlur, and Nongkhnun River Island.
Eastern West Khasi Hills	Kyllang Rock
Ri Bhoi	Lum Sohpetbneng, Orchid Resort, Dwar Ksuid, Lum Nehru Park, and Umiam Lake.

Source: Districts website of Meghalaya

Table (3) above discusses the district-wise tourist places in Meghalaya. It has been found that tourist places are scattered throughout Meghalaya's districts. North Garo Hills district is dominated by the indigenous Garo tribe, along with other minor tribes such as Rabhas, Boros, etc. Domahi (Magh Bihu), 50 Drums Wangala Festival, Megaru Festival, Nokpante Festival, and Annual Winter Festival attract thousands of tourists yearly. Wangala is the popular festival and Napsepgrika, Gaewang roa, Kambe toa, Do·kru-Sua, Chambil mpa, Mi Su·a, and Ajima roa are dances in West Garo Hills district. It has many historical places of Gao freedom fighters.

Garos, Kochs and Hajongs are the prominent tribes in South West Garo Hills. Garos are matrilineal tribes. The Koch people are Hindu and their language is listed as definitely endangered by UNESCO. Songs are an integral part of the Khasis and Jaintias culture. Their songs are dedicated to the nature and expressing love for their land. Weaving craft are unique among the tribals in Meghalaya. Khasi people are expert in producing the baskets, stools, and cane mat. They are also wave cloths.

Jowai is situated in the Jaintia Hills district. Lalong Park, Thadlaskein Lake, and Syntu Ksiar are the popular tourist destinations in the Jowai district. Syntu Ksiar is situated on the shores of river Myntdu. There are many waterfalls in Jowai. Tryshi Falls, Nartiang Monoliths, Krang Suri Falls, Umlawan Cave, Jowai Presbyterian Church, Umksor Caves, Kot Sati caves, Jarain Pitcher Plant Lake, Ialong Parka and Thadlaskein



Lake are the other known places. Jowai town is commercial and cultural spot in landscapes of the Jaintia Hills. Krang Suri Falls is situated in West Jaintia Hills District. Its emerald blue and cold water is well-known among the tourists. It is a nice picnic spot. Swimming and boating facilities are also available. When visiting from Shillong, the waterfalls is an hour before Krangsuri falls. The countryside view of the lake is beautiful, especially the paddy fields, wild florals, small brooks, etc. Sajar Nangli Thadlaskein Lake is situated on the Shillong-Jowai highway. The lake is beautiful because of its pine trees and green bushes. The bank of the lake is amazing in the afternoon.

Tura town is situated in West Garo Hills district. It is located in the western part of Meghalaya. The Garo tribes dominate this place. There are many waterfalls (Gandrak Falls, Pelgadare, Rongbangdare etc.) and streams (Dachima, Ganol, Nokmawari, Rangolwari etc.) in Tura. Chitmang Peak, Siju Cave, Nokrek Cave, and Balpakram are other popular tourist places. Balpakram is well-known for the endangered animals, as wild water buffalo, Red panda, Asian elephant, Indian bison, marbled cat, stump-tailed macaque, Hoolocks etc. Siju Cave and Nokrek Cave are the limestone cave and known for its stalactites and stalagmites. Some rare bat species are found in these caves. Tura Peak is nearly 900 metres above sea level. Nokrek Biosphere Reserve is the another tourist attraction of Tura. Chandigre Village and Rongbang Dare waterfalls are situated within the biosphere reserve. The village is encircled by coffee plantations and tea gardens, and ideal place for perceiving the Garo lifestyle.

The British founded Shillong the capital of Meghalaya in the second half of the nineteenth century. The city's weather is always delightful, especially from September to May. The city is very beautiful, and bounded by the pine trees. Shillong Heritage Walk, Phan Nonglait Park (formerly known as Lady Hydari Park), Ward's Lake, Golf links, Don Bosco Museum, and Elephant Falls are the popular tourist places. Every year annual (archery) festival is held in April/ May, attracting national and international tourists. Shillong is known as the 'Scotland of the east.' Cherrapunji and Mawsynram are well-known among the tourism, because for the higher rainfall in India. Cherrapunji is 50 kilometers away from the city. The living root bridge is popular among the tourist. September to November month is the best time for travelling the place. Mawjymbuin is situated near the Cherrapunji.

Table 4: Popular Caves in Meghalaya

Caves	Length	Location	Formation
Tetengkil Balwakol	5,681 m	Nengkhong village, Garo Hills	Limestone
Siju Cave	4,772 m	Siju village, Garo Hills	Limestone
Krem Wah Ryngo	3,416 m	Jaintia Hills	Limestone
Synrang-Pamiang	18,181 m	Chiehruhphi village, Jaintia Hills	Limestone
Krem Umsynrang	5,612 m	Jaintia Hills	Limestone



Krem Tyngheng	8,671 m	Jaintia Hills	Limestone
Krem Synrang Ngap	4,172 m	Jaintia Hills	Limestone
Krem Liat Prah	30,957 m	Jaintia Hills	Limestone
Krem Lympud Nongjri	6,641 m	Nongjri village, Khasi Hills	Limestone
Krem Mawkhyrdop	7,194 m	Khasi Hills	Limestone
Krem Shrieh Tangnub	8,862 m	Tangnub village, Jaintia Hills	Limestone
Umlawan Cave System	21,530 m	Lumshnong village, Jaintia Hills	Limestone

Source: Prepared by author from reports.

The above table (4) depicts caves in the hills of Meghalaya. It has been found that caves are scattered in hills of Meghalaya. Jaintia Hills have more number of caves. Dawki is situated in West Jaintia Hills. It is 95 kilometres from Shillong and near the Bangladesh border. It is surrounded by lush green vegetation. The main tourist attraction is the Umngot River. The place is nearly 70 kilometres from Shillong. Dwaki River Boating Point is situated near the bridge on NH 206. The crystal clear water of the Umngot River is popular among tourists. Umngot River is the cleanest river in the country. The place has mesmerizing beauty of nature. Dwaki River is a coral river. Dawki River, Borhill Falls, Shnongpdeng Village, Mawlynnong Village, and Single Living Root Bridge are the major Dawki tourist places. Jaflong Zero Point is the Indo-Bangladesh border situated near the Dwaki River. The sub-tropical mountains and the Mari river is near the Dawki. Boating, camping, zip lining, swimming, scuba diving, and fishing are the adventure sports in Dawki tourist places.

Mawlynnong is the cleanest village in Asia, and it is situated near Dawki. Traveller can observe how the local people booming the village. Borhill Falls is about nine kilometres away from Dawki. Jingmaham Living Root bridge is a single living root bridge. Krang Suri Falls is nearly 75 kilometres away from Dawki River. This place is more suitable for swimming and photoshoots. Byrdaw Falls is nearly 22 kilometres away from the Dawki river. Monsoon period is the perfect time for visiting the water fall, because it is nearly dried up in other periods. Bophill Falls is nearly six kilometres away from Dawki River.

Table 5: Relation between Tourist arrivals and Gross state domestic product of Meghalaya

Year	Tourist Arrivals	Gross State Domestic Product*#
2011-12	672307	199,180
2012-13	685567	218,720



2013-14	698042	229,380
2014-15	725133	232,350
2015-16	759192	251,170
2016-17	839363	274,390
2017-18	1002907	295,080
2018-19	1216454	321,760
2019-20	1271446	347,700

Source: Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
(<http://www.mospi.gov.in/>)

Note: * GSDP in ₹ millions, # pre-corona pandemic period.

Table 5 (a): Summary Output

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.969810771
R Square	0.940532932
Adjusted R Square	0.932037636
Standard Error	13043.99691
Observations	9

Source: Calculated by author.

Table 5 (b): ANOVA Analysis

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	18837223612	18837223612	110.71221	1.52828E-05
Residual	7	1191020988	170145855.4		
Total	8	20028244600			

Source: Calculated by author.

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	81438.91383	17822.72778	4.569385497	0.002576014
Tourist Arrivals	0.207966239	0.019764921	10.52198696	1.52828E-05

Source: Calculated by author.

Table (5-a) shows that R square is found to be 0.940532932, it shows the strong degree of relation between the independent variable X, i.e. arrivals of tourists, and the dependent variable Y, i.e. gross state domestic product. Table (5-b) shows that p value (1.52) is higher than the critical value at 5% level of significance ($p > 0.05$), therefore we will reject the alternative hypothesis-2. So, it is concluded that there is no relation between domestic tourist arrivals and gross state domestic product in Meghalaya.

The tourism industry is adversely affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The state government's revenue from the such industry was 6.9 lakh in 2013, Rs 24.77 crore in 2018, Rs 20.89 crore in 2019, and only Rs 3.48 crore in 2020. Majority of domestic tourists coming mostly from Assam and West Bengal. On the other hand, majority of international tourist are from rom Bangladesh. Tourism sector is a growing sector in Meghalaya. It has contributed in the economy of the state. To discuss the current overview of tourism sector of Meghalaya, we have done the SWOT analysis.

Table 6: SWOT Matrix for Tourism in Meghalaya

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Historical and Ethnic commonalities along with a cultural Diaspora • Education Index • Strategic Location for Look East Policy • Youthful Population • Strong Local Communities • Natural Resources • Moderate climatic conditions	• Poor connectivity and lack of infrastructure • Image problem- myths about terrorist activities • Low awareness in the market • Transport and Communication bottlenecks • Lack of network and synergy among public and private organizations
Opportunities	Threats
• Vast rural villages • Identifying Niche Area Innovation • Special attention to Northeast India • Vast unexplored rural destinations	• Economic Backwardness • Extortion network • Ethnic clashes • Competition with other states.

Therefore, there is huge potential of tourism in the state. Unexplored geographical features, rich cultural heritage, distinct & rich tribal culture, wildlife sanctuaries, a large English-speaking population, diversified biodiversity, evergreen forests, and river tributes are prominent factors for the potential growth of the tourism industry. Nevertheless, there are also challenges for the tourism industry. Lack of alternative means of transport, insurgencies and ethnic conflicts, boundary issues, poor connectivity and abysmal infrastructure are the challenges before the industry.



Conclusion

The tourism industry is growing in Meghalaya. It directly and indirectly contributes to the state economy. It generates employment, income, revenue, foreign exchange, infrastructure building, etc. Meghalaya has a variety of ecosystems, landscapes, and wildlife. Lakes are scattered throughout the whole state. Such lakes are popular among tourists for recreation and adventure activities. Tourists are involved in activities as swimming, boating, fishing etc. Meghalaya is known among the tourist for Shillong and Uiam River. Shillong is the capital and the best business hub in the state. It is a beautiful hills station. Meghalaya have many rivers. Rafting and camping are popular among the tourists.

Meghalaya is more popular the beautiful hills stations. Tourists are involved in adventure activities such as rock climbing, mountain biking, village tours, meditations, Paragliding and hang gliding, etc. Village-based resorts, ethnic songs and dances, festivals, handicrafts, organic produce, ethnic cuisine and food products are additional advantage for the tourist. There are more opportunities in ecotourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, and agri-tourism. Lack of tourist-friendly infrastructure, inadequate marketing and promotion, shortage of skilled manpower, lack of regulations/standards, and lack of ecology were the basic challenges before the tourism industry.

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